



Wednesday Wisdom

The Sydney Bridge Centre mini lesson

Julian Foster (many times NSW representative) will be analysing an interesting hand from each Wednesday morning session. This hand commentary will be sent to participants before the next Wednesday BBO session.

You are also welcome to [send questions](#) about hands that you have played. We will collate them and let our panellists (Julian Foster, Marcia Scudder and Paul Roach) answer them.

#33936 BBO – Wednesday morning session 4th November 2020

20	♠ 7652	<i>Dir: W</i>																									
	♥ KJ5	<i>Vul: Both</i>																									
	♦ QJ65																										
	♣ 52																										
♠ AKJT93	♠ Q																										
♥ A	♥ QT64																										
♦ A92	♦ T3																										
♣ Q73	♣ AKJ864																										
7 ♠ 84																											
18 12 ♥ 98732																											
3 ♦ K874																											
♣ T9																											
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♣	♦	♥	♠	NT																							
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Last week I was asked a question about board 20. Specifically whatever it's possible to bid a grand slam even though EW are missing two kings.

Bidding slams is hard – many are missed even at world championship level. It is not about brute strength or honour cards though – it is more about being able to visualise where you will get tricks from and ensuring you have all suits controlled. Just because we are missing two kings doesn't mean we can't bid a grand slam – we might easily have 13 tricks with two long suits (on this hand we have 14!) Let's have a look and see how we could bid it.

Looking at the results I see two pairs did reach slam in clubs. Both started by opening the West hand 2♣ (strong). Even though it's a very nice hand I

personally would open it 1♠. It depends a little on what you play 2♣ as. These days quite a few pairs agree 2♣ is an unconditional game force. If you do that then this hand isn't good enough - it has 5 losers and only 7 certain tricks. Opening 2♣ has another downside - the amount of bidding space it consumes. It's easy to get quite high before you find out what, if any, fit you have. That leaves less room later to judge whether slam is available.

If West had opened 2♣ I would respond 3♣ with East - traditionally a positive response. There is no need to jump. Indeed it's far better NOT to jump. 3♣ will establish a game force (even if 2♣ hadn't already) and, as mentioned above, we have already used a lot of bidding space. Hence you want to leave room for partner to tell you why they opened 2♣.

Returning to the situation where West opens 1♠, East will bid 2♣ (which I am assuming is 10+ points but not game forcing – see advanced section for a bit more about this). Now what?

West should rebid 3♠ in my view. That is game forcing. Why? Because it is showing a better than minimum hand (15+) and partners response showed 10+.

Does it set spades as trumps? No. It just shows 6+ spades (usually fairly good ones – with a broken suit you might choose to bid NT or something else). West cannot raise clubs because East doesn't have to have more than 4 for 2♣. What would you respond with a 2434 10 point hand?

Back to East. At this point I would raise to 4♠ even though I only have one. That's because it's the Q which is likely to be very useful to fill in gaps in partner's suit. Bidding 3NT could be silly as I have nothing in diamonds. If I had a small singleton spade I would probably bid 4♣ which should be NATURAL (please don't play 4♣ as Gerber ace ask – it is massively inferior, there are so many situations where you need 4♣ to be natural, or a cue bid instead). If East does bid 4♣ then West can happily blackwood over that and the pair should then reach at least 6♣.

Over 4♠ West can also start slam explorations with 4NT key card blackwood. They have an enormous hand, partner has raised spades, they have both red aces and, most importantly of all, they have Qxx in the suit partner bid first which should help to set it up.

East will show 1 key card. So the auction so far has been 1♠-2♣-3♠-4♠-4NT-5♦ (or 5♣ depending on what blackwood responses you play).

Now West should ask for the Queen of trumps and when East confirms they hold that card, West can bid slam. Playing matchpoints you prefer to play in spades – indeed with this auction West still doesn't even know there is a club fit.

Is it feasible to bid to a grand slam? Yes very much so provided you have some more agreements about what happens after blackwood – see advanced section.

There is of course nothing to the play on this hand – you have 14 top tricks!

Key points to note

- Opening 2♣ consumes a lot of space and should be reserved for REALLY strong hands
- After a 2 level response, any jump rebid by opener is game forcing because it's showing at least 15 points opposite at least 10.
- Always playing 4♣ as ace ask is not a good method – there are many situations where you want 4♣ as a natural bid or as a cue bid.
- Slam bidding requires partnership trust, an appreciation of the trick taking power of hands, and an ability to ensure you have all the suits controlled.

More advanced

First a minor diversion – some pairs play a “2 over 1” method where a 2 level response is itself game forcing. East is worth that here with their good suit. Over that, it is then a matter of partnership agreement whether West should leave more room and just bid 2♠ or whether they should try and express their extra values by jumping to 3♠ anyway. It is important for 2 over 1 players to discuss what bids show extra values and what bids don't.

Let us return to our auction. So far it's 1♠-2♣-3♠-4♠-4NT-5♦ (or 5♣). Getting to use blackwood is always nice as it means we are near the slam zone. But many pairs don't discuss what happens next. There are many possible schemes but one that is almost universal over the 5♣/5♦ responses is the next bid up (in a side suit – so 5♦ or 5♥ here) asks for the Q of trumps (this is obviously not needed over 5♥/5♠ responses as they already deny and show that card).

There are variations in responses. A method I play with my regular partner is quite popular and works very well on this hand. It tells partner about the Q but, when I have the Q, I also tell him about my side suit kings. Knowing exactly WHICH side suit king you have can help partner enormously.

Responses are:

- Most economical of the trump suit or NT (5♠ here) = Denies the Q of trumps (this doesn't say anything about kings).
- Least economical of the trump suit or NT (5NT here) = Shows the Q of trumps but denies any side suit king.
- Bids of other suits = Show the Q of trumps and the K of this suit (if you are lucky enough to have 2 kings, show the more economical or the one you think will be of most use for partner to know about).

Here East now bids 6♣ which shows the ♠Q and the ♣K. This is music to West's ears – they now know they have 6 spade tricks, ♣AKQ and the two red aces. That's 11 tricks already. And whenever East has length in clubs (remember West doesn't know this yet) those are likely to take more tricks.

Note the enormous difference knowing East has the ♣K. Just knowing East had ONE side suit king is nowhere near as useful – the ♥K or ♦K will only be worth 1 trick whereas the ♣K could be worth lots as it will usually make the whole club suit run.

Similar principles apply to other blackwood continuations – e.g. a bid that asks for kings (some play this as 5NT, others as the next available side suit step). You can play responses showing the number of kings, or specific kings. The latter is better in my view.

In our auction after 6♣ it is not unreasonable for West to just bid 7♠ directly – they are effectively gambling that East has at least 5 clubs (so a 5-3 club fit will produce 5 tricks when they split 3-2). 5 clubs, 6 spades and 2 aces = 13.

However if West is concerned that East still might have the 2434 sort of hand shape that I mentioned earlier then they can try something else.

If at this point West bids 6♦ or 6♥ this must logically be a grand slam try. Why? Because if they were only interested in 6♠ they would just have bid that directly. Therefore when they do something else they are trying to consult their partner about bidding to 7 or not. If East is not interested they should sign off in 6♠. Here, however, East should most definitely accept that offer because they are have a good 6 card club suit which partner doesn't know about (yet partner is STILL looking for grand slam all by themselves!)

Note how much trust this requires. East trusts that West would only bid 6♦ or 6♥ when they have all the top controls (which West knows following the blackwood response). East also needs to appreciate what they could have had for their bidding to date – and therefore how much better their actual hand is than that! I would actually bid 7♣ over 6♦ or 6♥ to try and tell partner I think that might be a playable spot. Now West knows East has long clubs so they can count 13 tricks (6♠, ♥A, ♦A and at least 5♣) and bid 7NT. At matchpoints bidding and making a grand slam always tends to score well but getting the extra 10 points for bidding 7NT is really the icing on the cake!

Julian Foster (many times NSW representative)

The Sydney Bridge Centre is now running F2F club sessions AND online sessions on BBO

Yes, we have reopened on Goulburn Street only. Rozelle and Henley remain closed for the time being. We are now running F2F sessions in the City AND also online sessions on BBO. Please find our full session timetable on our website:

<https://www.sydneybridgecentre.com/sbc-sessions/>

For Face-to-Face sessions:

All are welcome but due to Covid restrictions the numbers are limited. It is essential that you pre-book for these sessions via this [F2F Session Booking Form](#). Walk-ins are welcome for sessions which are not fully booked.

Normal table money fee.

For BBO sessions:

All are welcome. No need to book. Please find us on BBO / Featured Areas / Virtual Clubs / ABF-Australia. Tournament title "Sydney Bridge Centre & Friends". Tournament will open only 2 hours before the game starts.

BB\$3 per person per game.